

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
AVIATION SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING
ON AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL MODERNIZATION
MARCH 25, 1999

- Thank you, Chairman Gorton. I appreciate your calling this hearing on an absolutely critical issue. It is clear that modernization of the nation's air traffic control system will be essential if we are going to have a healthy and efficient air transportation system in the next century. According to projections released by the FAA on Tuesday, the number of air travelers will increase to almost one billion in 2010. That is about 45 percent more flyers than last year.
- If we are going to accommodate that kind of sustained growth, we must have additional capacity in the system. As at least one of our witnesses will testify, average flight delays could quadruple by then. As the National Civil Aviation Review Commission concluded, every day at an airport will be like the day before Thanksgiving if we don't act soon.
- Part of the answer to resolving future capacity constraints involves improving the nation's system of airports. Which is why it is so important that we enact a long-term reauthorization for the Airport Improvement Program as soon as possible. The other part of the solution involves improving the air traffic control system.
- I am well aware of the many problems the FAA has had in the past, and the billions of dollars that have been wasted on some aspects of modernization. I still have grave concerns about many ongoing programs and the plans for the future. That is why we rely upon the Inspector General's office and the GAO to keep a close eye on these activities. I hope that the FAA will heed the recommendations of these organizations so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. I know that the agency is filled with hard working, dedicated employees, and I greatly appreciate their service to our nation. But we cannot afford any more mistakes.
- The fact that the FAA is now working closely with the aviation community is a very positive sign. The term "consensus" is thrown around a great deal these days. But it is an especially important component of the modernization effort because the industry must make changes and investments that proceed in lockstep with the FAA. We all know that the aviation community is rarely united, so it is remarkable that the new approach to modernization has such widespread

support. I hope that it is a sign of things to come. We owe it to the flying public.

- I appreciate everyone's participation this morning and look forward to your testimony.